

**The Ohio State University  
First-Year Seminar Program  
Course Proposal**

**Course Information**

1. Attach a syllabus that includes the following (sample syllabi can be found at <http://firstyearseminars.osu.edu>):
  - the course goals
  - a brief description of the content
  - the distribution of meeting times
  - a weekly topical outline
  - a listing of assignments
  - grade assessment information (A-E or S/U)
  - required textbooks and/or reading list
  - the academic misconduct and disability services statements (sample statements can be found at <http://ascas.osu.edu/curriculum/asc-syllabus-elements>)

**Instructor Information**

2. Attach a brief biographical paragraph that includes the current research interests, teaching awards and honors, and undergraduate courses taught by the participating instructor(s).

Sean O'Sullivan – English

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Proposer's Name and Primary Academic Unit (please print)

Associate Professor

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Proposer's Title

osullivan.15@osu.edu

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Proposer's e-mail Address

February 25, 2022

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Submission Date

Susan Williams

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Approval of Department Chair of Academic Unit (please print)

**Please return this form and any attachments to Todd Bitters, [bitters.4@osu.edu](mailto:bitters.4@osu.edu), no later than MARCH 1.**

# The Legacy of *The Sopranos*

Arts and Sciences 1137.xx

Autumn 2022

## **Class meetings:**

TBD

## **Instructor information:**

Professor Sean O'Sullivan

557 Denney

osullivan.15@osu.edu

Office hours: TBD

## **Course description:**

Every young person in America is watching *The Sopranos*. That was the claim last fall in the headline of a *New York Times* article, which noted that the show's streaming hours tripled during the pandemic, and suggested that a "new audience is seeing something different" in the series that took television by storm more than twenty years ago. That apparent full-on revival was recently confirmed in the most highly visible of cultural spaces: a Super Bowl commercial, one that painstakingly recreated the opening credits of the show, this time featuring Tony Soprano's daughter Meadow literally in the driver's seat. This course will consider what *The Sopranos* was, how it both challenged and embraced the conventions of television, and how television in 2022 reflects the series' legacy. We will focus on the first season, week by week, looking closely at the strategies that *The Sopranos* adopted in 1990 from the established rhythms of serial storytelling in order to create itself, and then to transform the language of television and our collective expectations of the medium. The course trajectory will consider how the television season—arguably the most compelling narrative form of the first decades of the 21<sup>st</sup> century—was rediscovered and remade through *The Sopranos*' improvised experiment.

## **Course objectives**

- 1) To develop critical thinking about art forms and practices.
- 2) To learn about television as a narrative instrument.
- 3) To investigate serial storytelling as a social and aesthetic phenomenon.
- 4) To examine how popular media change over time.

## **Viewings and readings**

**Viewings:** Students will watch one episode each week, preparing themselves to discuss the formal strategies and representational choices of each hour of the first season. The entire season is available to students via OSU's Secured Media Library.

**Readings:** Students will read six short articles or book excerpts over the course of the semester—roughly one reading every other week. These readings will engage issues of storytelling, the practice of television, and the cultural impact of *The Sopranos*. All readings will be available on Carmen.

## Requirements

**Participation:** A seminar requires the active participation of all members. Everyone will be encouraged to contribute to discussion, in service of our group’s ongoing observations, ideas, and arguments.

**Response:** Students will write a brief response to one episode from the first season of *The Sopranos*—choosing an installment from one of the first two “phases” of the season. The response should address particular choices, patterns, and consequences of a specific episode, reflecting on how the techniques and effects of episodic storytelling contribute to the construction of a television season. Preparing and writing the response will give students the opportunity to discover the ins and outs of the television episode as a distinct art form.

**Final exploration:** Students will conclude the course by connecting *The Sopranos* to any recent television series of their choosing. The goal of the final exploration will be to consider the continuities and discontinuities of storytelling parameters, viewing platforms, and audience expectations between 1999 and the 2020s. Students will have the option of a written paper or a media project, such as a video essay or podcast episode.

### Assessment distribution:

Participation and attendance:	40%
Response (due by Week 9):	20%
Final exploration (due in Week 15):	40%

**Biographical statement:** I have been teaching courses in television, film, and narrative theory at Ohio State since 2006, as a professor in the English department and a core faculty member of the Film Studies program. Topics of some recent classes include TV comedy of the 2010s (including *Girls*, *Fleabag*, and *Atlanta*) and re-inventing TV genre (including *Killing Eve*, *Fargo*, and *Watchmen*). I’ve published widely on television storytelling, including articles on *The Sopranos*, *Mad Men*, *Breaking Bad*, and *Deadwood*, with a particular emphasis on the history and designs of serial storytelling, starting with Homer’s *Odyssey*. My current book project is on the “sonnet-season,” my term for the 13-episode season form that transformed television narrative in our current millennium.

## Course schedule

Week 1: What is television?

### **Season 1, Phase 1 Discovering the Possibilities**

Week 2: *The Sopranos* 1:1 (“The Sopranos”)

Reading: David Chase, “Introduction” from *The Sopranos: Selected Scripts from Three Seasons*

Week 3: *The Sopranos* 1:2 (“46 Long”)

Week 4: *The Sopranos* 1:3 (“Denial, Anger, Acceptance”)

Reading: Kathryn VanArendonk, “Theorizing the Television Episode”

Week 5: *The Sopranos* 1:4 (“Meadowlands”)

### **Season 1, Phase 2 The Open Middle**

Week 6: *The Sopranos* 1:5 (“College”)

Reading: Charles McGrath, “Triumph of the Prime-Time Novel”

Week 7: *The Sopranos* 1:6 (“Pax Soprana”)

Week 8: *The Sopranos* 1:7 (“Down Neck”)

Reading: Robyn Warhol, excerpt from *Having a Good Cry*

Week 9: *The Sopranos* 1:8 (“The Legend of Tennessee Moltisanti”)

**Response due by end of Week 9**

### **Season 1, Phase 3 Finding a Shape**

Week 10: *The Sopranos* 1:9 (“Boca”)

Week 11: *The Sopranos* 1:10 (“A Hit Is a Hit”)

- Week 12:            *The Sopranos* 1:11 (“Nobody Knows Anything”)  
Reading: Emily Nussbaum, “When TV Became Art”
- Week 13:            *The Sopranos* 1:12 (“Isabella”)
- Week 14:            *The Sopranos* 1:13 (“I Dream of Jeannie Cusamano”)  
Reading: Vincent Canby, “From the Humble Mini-Series Comes the Magnificent Mega-Movie”
- Week 15:            **Final exploration due**

### **Academic misconduct**

This is the University’s official statement on academic misconduct: “It is the responsibility of the Committee on Academic Misconduct to investigate or establish procedures for the investigation of all reported cases of student academic misconduct. The term “academic misconduct” includes all forms of student academic misconduct wherever committed, illustrated by, but not limited to, cases of plagiarism in connection with examinations. Instructors shall report all instances of alleged academic misconduct to the committee (Faculty Rule 3335-5-487). For additional information, see the Code of Student Conduct [<http://studentaffairs.osu.edu/csc/>].”

Plagiarism is the representation of another's works or ideas as one’s own: it includes the unacknowledged word-for-word use and/or paraphrasing of another person's work, and/or the inappropriate unacknowledged use of another person's ideas. If you have any questions, please feel free to discuss the details of this policy with me.

### **Students with disability**

Students with documented disabilities who have registered with SLDS will be appropriately accommodated and should inform the instructor as soon as possible of their needs.

The Office of Student Life Disability Services (SLDS) offers services for students with documented disabilities. SLDS is located in 098 Baker Hall, 113 W. 12<sup>th</sup> Ave. Tel.: 614-292-3307; VRS: 614-429-1334; email: [slds@osu.edu](mailto:slds@osu.edu); Web: [slds.osu.edu](http://slds.osu.edu).